

Follow the Leader

by HarleyD

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Summary: Alpha/Beta/Omega universe (my first attempt!) Rick is an alpha and when he stumbles upon the group in Atlanta he realizes that Merle has more at stake than just his own life. He just wants to make sure his Omega brother is safe. Rick and Lori have been divorced for a while and Shane and Lori are together. Canon divergence, Merle is a good brother. Rickyl, m/m

1. Chapter 1

Merle desperately pulled at his hand, but the cuffs had no give and with the Alpha in his face it was hard not to panic. He didn't even know where he had come from, had only gotten in passing that his name was Rick, and he let out another snarl.

He was trapped, they both knew it, and he snarled at him, daring him to come any closer. He still had one hand free, he could still fight. He may only be a beta but he hadn't rolled over and blindly listened to any alpha so far, and he wasn't going to start now.

"Relax." The Alpha's voice was firm, and Merle wondered how the fuck he was supposed to relax when the key to the cuffs had just disappeared and walkers were coming on heavy.

Even though Merle was baring his teeth, growling, the Alpha moved up close enough to grab his free arm, stopping him from striking out and grabbed his shirt with his other hand pressing him against the pipe. He looked away from Merle to the others and yelled, "Go, now! I'm right behind you!"

Fear was threatening to overwhelm him as he realized that he was going to be left on the roof to die. He was only out on this run because of his damned brother, and he didn't even—his thoughts abruptly trailed off as he was hit square in the chest with the realization. _Daryl_.

His eyes flew up to meet the other man, and he stumbled around the

words, "Rickâ€| "

"Listen. You need to stay calm. I'm gonna lock that door over there and we're gonna go back to your people, get better supplies and come back for you." Rick had shoved a canteen into his hands and he took it without really paying attention. Merle just needed him to stop talking, needed to tell him about his brother and it took a moment for the words to sink in.

"What?"

Rick tilted his head so he could meet Merle's eyes and held them, "I give you my word. You'll be safe till we get back and I will be back. Just don't do anything dumb. Understand?"

The thought of any alpha made him bristle and when a strange one had stumbled in to their group he hadn't liked it, and not just because he didn't like authority. Though he didn't. They only had one other alpha in their group, and that kept his brother safe, but he didn't want another one sniffing around.

This man didn't smell like the other Alpha though, he smelled stronger and he spoke straight to Merle and defended these people like they were already part of his pack. The roof had cleared behind him and he nodded at the question and Rick returned it before moving to his feet. Merle realized what he was forgetting and reached out to grab his arm, "Wait!"

"Nothing I can do Merle, or I would be doing it. The sooner I go the faster we can get back."

"No, my brother." He swallowed down the lump in his throat realizing what he was about to give away and hoped it wouldn't come back to bite him in the ass. "My brother is an omega, no one knows at camp, he's on suppressants." He saw Rick's eyes go wide and he forced himself to continue, "There is another alpha at camp but he's not right, he'll ..." Oh, he was well aware of what would happen to his brother if he couldn't get back, if he ran out of suppressants. He'd end up at the whim of any alpha that wanted him, and Shaneâ€| Shane would be bad. "If I don't make it back promise me you will take care of him."

"Merle-"

His rage boiled over and he snarled out, "You did this and if I can't get back to protect him and that other alphaâ€| what happens to him will be on you. Promise you will protect him."

Rick held his eyes for a few moments, seemingly oblivious to the sounds around the of walkers approaching, of their people yelling for Rick to hurry.

"I will. I promise. It won't matter though, I'll be back to get you tomorrow."

"Okay." He didn't believe that, that he would be rescued but he had believed him when he said he would protect Daryl. He almost forgot why he had been out here and reached into his pocket, shoving the packets towards Rick. Rick looked down at them, eyebrows creased before he realized they were heat suppressants.

They made eye contact again and Rick made it clear he understood, Merle was out here risking his life for his brother and he wouldn't let it be in vain. "His name is Daryl."

Rick touched his shoulder and Merle didn't have it in himself to growl or pull away. "I'll see you tomorrow. Daryl will be fine."

Rick shoved the suppressants in his pocket and took off running, and once he turned the corner Merle couldn't see anything. He listened to what sounded like a door slamming and then a few minutes later the growls of walkers and he took shallow breaths trying to be as quiet as possible. It wouldn't do anything if they got through but maybe if they didn't think anyone was up there they would eventually leave.

It seemed to take forever but finally the sounds faded away and he was sure he was left alone. Alone handcuffed on a roof. He tugged on his arm again, even though he knew it wouldn't do anything. Glancing around he saw some tools, a hacksaw that wouldn't make it through the chain but maybe... well, he would wait a day to see what would happen and then he'd consider his options. He looked up at the sky, the blazing sun, and hoped that he had made the right decision to tell Rick. He held the half canteen of water close to him, and waited.

2. Chapter 2

Even though he was still far off Daryl smelled the Alpha that ran their group near him, the screaming must have drawn him closer and he resisted the urge to hide. It had been a two days since he'd run out of suppressants, and though he was sure Shane still couldn't tell he had started to get a few odd looks.

Merle leaving put him on edge, left him hiding in the woods, waiting nervously for him to return. He had been tracking the deer but he was going to leave it, if Shane was nearby he would get it, when a new scent hit his nose.

He stumbled, head whipping around. It was the smell of another alpha, but this was nothing like Shane's scent. His had always been a bit muddled, like the alpha wasn't quite right but this scent... Daryl found himself heading towards it.

Just outside of the clearing he saw Shane, a few of their people standing around, and one man he didn't know. The scent hit him harder and he felt like his heart was in his throat, because this man... from where he watched he could see that Shane submitted to him and from their body language, he was sure they knew each other.

He didn't smell Merle anywhere though and his mouth went dry, he should have come looking for him by now. He took a deep breath and pushed through the trees. The eyes all turned to him and he forced himself not to respond, paying attention to a deer. He didn't have to fake the anger when he realized what had happened.

"Think we can cut around it?"

He glanced up at the new man and his heart raced, because he was looking at him like he knew exactly what he was. For a moment of panic Daryl thought the suppressants had completely worn off but he knew he still smelled like a beta, could tell by the casual glance Shane sent his way.

The eyes on him were making him nervous and he snapped at them for not putting a knife through the head before heading back to camp. The smell of the new Alpha filled his nose, his head and he needed to get away from him. He should be asking who the guy was, it was telling that he just fled instead, but he needed to find out where the hell Merle was.

He felt more than saw them following him, and his anxiety spiked. He heard them talking but he ignored it for the most part, but he was aware of the new man telling Shane it would be better to tell him before he reached everyone else. Shane had replied that they would just wait and Daryl didn't know what that was about but it made a lead weight appear in his stomach.

At camp Merle's scent was still nowhere to be found and even though he knew what that meant he couldn't help calling out. "Merle! I got some squirrels." He glanced around, his eyes jumping around as he realized everyone was looking at him, before setting down his stuff. He never would admit that his voice went a little high pitched, "Merle, get your ass out here."

"Daryl, we need to talk." He turned to look at Shane, and now he could see by the look on his face that something was wrong. Really wrong, though if he was honest he already knew that.

"Shane?"

"It's about your brother."

He stared at him, another nervous glance around at the others, his gaze hesitating on the other Alpha looking at him with something close to pity.

His stomach had lurched up into this throat and he forced out the words, trying to stay calm so he didn't embarrass himself. "He dead?"

Shane rubbed at the back of his head and Daryl didn't miss it as he cast a glance at the new man, almost like he was looking for directions. That was different, Shane had run this camp since him and his brother limped into it. "We aren't sure."

He found his gaze going to the new Alpha like Shane's had and he hated the way his voice wavered, though he tried to sound mean, "He either is or he aint!"

Finally the other man stepped forward and he was too worried about Merle to even think about backing up, letting the man move close to him, "There's no easy way to say this, so I'll just say it." He put his hand out almost like he was trying to calm a wild animal, "Your brother was a danger to us all, so I handcuffed him on a roof, hooked him to a piece of metal. He's still there."

"Who are you?"

Rick's eyes held his, looking serious. "I'm Rick Grimes."

Daryl's breath was coming out in jagged huffs and he felt tears pressing at his eyes, wishing that he didn't have such an audience. His mind connected it though, Lori's former mate, Shane's partner. He didn't care. "Hold on. Let me process this. You're saying you handcuffed my brother to a roof and you left him there?" His voice should be angry, furious but instead it sounded like he was begging Rick to give him any other answer. All the possibilities of what would happen if Merle was gone flashed through his head and he thought he might be sick.

Rick tilted his head a little, regret clear on his face, "Yes."

Daryl screamed like a wounded animal and threw himself at Rick, not surprised at how easily he was shoved aside. Not with how alpha the other smelled. Even through his rage his inner omega was screaming out that he wasn't submitting, that he should be cowering before such a strong Alpha. He tumbled to the ground and blindly grabbed for his knife, flying back to his feet not even sure what he was going to do. He didn't have the chance to decide as Shane slammed into him from the side, taking him down and wrapping him up into a chokehold.

"Let me go!"

"No, I think it's probably better than I don't."

"Chokeholds are illegal." He hated that the words came out of his mouth, they were panicked and whiny but it was all that came to mind.

"So file a complaint. Relax man, I can do this all day." Shane's tone was mocking, not even pretending like he wasn't laughing at him as he kept him pinned down on the ground, unable to move. Shane was too big, and he couldn't move, unable to help it as his emotions went haywire. He was embarrassed and frustrated and angry and he could feel the tears falling down his cheeks, making it so much worse. Shane forced him down harder and his entire being was screaming at him to submit.

Rick crouched down in front of him and even if no one could see him flinch hard back he knew that Shane could feel it. They were ganging up on him and he didn't have Merle to protect him. If Merle was gone he had no one to stand between him and Shane, no one to stop anything the alphas might want to do.

He couldn't move at all and he knew he was helpless, going still in the grasp except for his panicked panting. Rick waited until he caught his eyes and his voice was flat, but firm. Clearly he wasn't going to take any shit, and it was amazing that someone that just waltzed into the camp an hour ago apparently held so much power, "I'd like to have a calm discussion on this topic. Do you think we can manage that?" He only stared so Rick repeated himself, "Do you think we can manage that?" The tone the second time had changed slightly, though Daryl couldn't figure out how. It made him tilt his head though, his omega instincts kicking into high drive. Alpha command, but still just this side of being a suggestion.

He glared some more for what good it did him, but Shane squeezed tighter until he couldn't breathe at all and panic took over, Shane's breathe hot on the side of his face as he sneered at him, "Hmm?"

"Mmm." The first sound he made was barely a squeak of compliance, the hold too tight to do much else. Shane loosened his grip and Daryl choked out, "Fine."

All at once Shane let him go and he couldn't stop himself from tumbling flat on his face, gasping for breath. Rick didn't back off even though he wasn't restrained anymore, and he got the message loud and clear that Rick wasn't afraid of him. He didn't want to have this conversation anymore, wanted to tell them all to fuck off and run off on his own to try to find Merle, to lick his wounds, so tried to keep his gaze on the ground. Rick didn't allow it, after seconds ticked by that he didn't look up a hand grabbed his jaw and forced his face up until their eyes met. "What I did was not on a whim. Your brother does not work and play well with others." Their eyes met and he looked away, and if the position had allowed it he would have bared his neck.

He knew Merle didn't play nice. Even though Merle was a beta he had bared his teeth at Shane and growled and fought him every step. He knew. Rick didn't let go and the constant pressure made him scramble upright to his knees and nothing on Rick's face said he was being insincere. Nothing said he was enjoying this, nothing like the grin stretching across Shane's face.

It wasn't until he saw the pleased look on Rick's face did he realize he stopped fighting against the hold, leaning into the other a little and waiting for what was going to happen next. "Good boy." Rick muttered the words, giving him a pleased smile and he had to fight not to preen at having an Alpha's praise. This time when he tried to look away Rick let him before he was hauled to his feet by his arm. He swayed for a moment, still catching his breath but stood on his own.

"It wasn't his fault. I was the one with the key, I dropped it down a drain..."

Daryl had forgotten they weren't alone and he scrubbed his sleeve across his face, trying to wipe away the tears even though he knew it was too late to hide them. "Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"I chained the door so the geeks couldn't get it, so he'd be safe."

The information processed slowly and when it did a small flare of hope appeared, "Where did you leave him, forget all of you, I'll go get him myself."

"No." The word was like steel and made him flinch, frustration welling up, but it had no time to go anywhere before Rick continued. "I'm going back. We'll go together and get him. Okay?" He didn't answer right away so Rick reached out and grabbed his shoulder, firm enough to hold him in place. "Okay?"

It brooked no argument and he looked at the ground, and nodded his

head. "Okay, get what you need together, I'll see who else wants to go and we'll go first thing in the morning. Got it?"

"Yes." The word was tight and as soon as Rick let go of his shoulder he bolted to his side of the camp, needing a moment to gather himself. Needed a moment to shake the other's scent and convince his body that it didn't want to fall down at his feet and roll in it. He needed his brother, and desperately he begged to whatever would listen that he would be there safe and sound when they went back for him. He glanced back once at the Alpha standing there, big and strong, and knew that he was in trouble.

3. Chapter 3

After a few moments the crowd dispersed a bit until just Rick and Shane were left as Shane gave him a light punch, "You handle him well. He's usually hiding behind his brother. Even when I get my hands on him he usually fights like a rabid dog."

Rick nodded without looking at Shane, keeping an eye on where the younger Dixon had gone. He had seen the fear, and he was sure Shane did as well but they had different ideas about what to do with it. It settled poorly in his gut, the way it had happened and he glanced at Shane. "I'm gonna go check on him." Shane didn't know the boy was an omega, though Rick could smell the edges of it, hell, Rick could tell just by the way he acted, and he didn't want to leave him alone.

"He's fine Rick, hell, he'll probably be easier to deal with now that he doesn't have his brother standing behind him." He sounded like he was justifying it to himself, "Believe me, those two have not been easy to deal with. Daryl isn't too bad but Merle... if I didn't know better I'd say he was an alpha with the way he fights everything."

"All betas in the group?"

He felt more than saw Shane nod, "Yea, Lori and I have been running things mostly, haven't seen any other Alphas since it started."

"No omegas?"

Shane let out a rough chuckle, "Christ, I'm not even sure they exist anymore. Too rough out there for them. Man, I'd love to get my hands on one though." He grinned back at Shane, but felt the weight settle in his stomach.

Yeah, it was that exact wording that he didn't like. He knew what his partner thought of omegas, it would almost be worth it to tell him about Daryl just so he could see the shock on his face. Rick nodded like he agreed but still headed towards the tent that was set up far from everyone else, farther away than it should be to keep the occupants safe. "Just gonna check on him." Behind him he heard Shane make an annoyed sound, but that wasn't going to deter him. He crouched down in front of the zipped up door and smacked his hand against it, not sure how to knock on a tent.

There was no answer after he waited for a minute and he tried again. When there was still no answer he reached for the zipper, pulling it

open. He slipped inside, frowning at the sight that met him.

"Get... get out!"

Daryl was curled up on one side, his eyes red rimmed and tears on his face, surprised that Rick had come into his tent. "Come here."

"What?"

"Come here."

Daryl just stared at him, not sure what was going on. He desperately wanted Merle here, he would know what to do, he'd make sure that Daryl didn't get pushed around by these people. What the fuck was he going to do if Merle was gone. "No."

Rick fully settled on the ground and snapped out, "Here, now."

Daryl was moving forward without much thought at that command, face flushing as he gave away so much about himself. He tried to comfort himself that even as a beta it wasn't out of the norm that he would respond the same, he could do this. As soon as he was close enough Rick fisted his hand in Daryl's vest and dragged him forward.

He squealed, off balance as he fell against him, landing half in his lap. So many bad intentions that started out this way and he tried to struggle but those hands were strong and in a matter of seconds he found himself manipulated so he was cuddled up against the other man, his face tucked against his shirt. His nose was full of his scent, and not just the normal alpha scent. It was calming, settling his nerves and made him want to press against him forever.

A big hand cupped the back of his head, holding him there. It should have made him feel trapped, so trapped and he should have demanded that he was let go but all that came out was a sob and then he was crying into the man's shirt.

A strange man that he knew nothing about, that may have killed his brother, that had just forced his submission in front of everyone and he should tell him to fuck off. He didn't though. He clung to Rick's waist, sobbing without care for how he looked. His omega instincts were in full drive and he had an alpha here to comfort him, and he gave up trying to fight it.

"Hey. Shh. It's okay." The hand stroked the back of his head, mindless soothing noises and it kept up until his tears tapered off, and he worked on slowing his breathing, still held close. He hadn't been held in ... he couldn't remember ever being held by someone that didn't plan on hurting him.

He wasn't sure how long he cried, but it felt like a lifetime. It was selfish, they needed to be off trying to find Merle, and instead he was in his tent crying like a little girl. Even after the tears stopped he didn't move, hiding his face against this man's shirt, too embarrassed to look up. What the hell had come over him that he would break down like this with an alpha he didn't know. He should be doing everything he could to look tough, he had been holding his own with Shane, he didn't know what was so different with this man.

The hand on the back of his head was stroking his hair and he took a couple deep breaths before pushing away, though he didn't move too far back. He stared down at the ground, not sure what to say, and could feel his face flushed all the way to his ears. It surprised him that he didn't startle when Rick reached up and wiped away his tears with his sleeve.

"Better?"

No mocking and he finally risked a glance up, just long enough to see concern and nothing else before he looked back to the ground. "We should probably go, they are gonna wonder where we went."

"Better?"

He shifted his weight and hunched his shoulders, uncomfortable. Rick was blocking the door though, and he didn't seem like he was going to move anytime soon. "Yes." The word was short, clipped, and he could only imagine what someone like Merle or Shane would do if he used that tone with them.

Rick didn't seem to mind though, and he thought he saw a small pull of a smile. "You sure you want to go do this, I can go by myself."

"I'm tough." The tone had gotten worse, a snarl almost, because it was true. He forced himself to look up and meet Rick's eyes, "I can fight, you can ask Shane. And I don't mind getting dirty. I'm notâ€|"

He wasn't sure what he was not. Had no way to explain what was wrong, not without giving everything away.

"I believe that. I just think you're in shock, this was my mistake and I'm gonna fix it."

"You'll bring Merle back?" He realized how that sounded and he waved his hands in the air a little, like he was trying to erase it. "I'm going. But I'm sure Shane told you what Merle was like, you're gonna be okay with him back at camp?"

"Sure." Relief peaked in Daryl's chest but the next words stomped it out. "As long as he follows the rules."

"He won't."

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Rick nod like he had thought that. "We'll work on it, first step is getting him back here." He moved like he was getting up but suddenly leaned forward into Daryl's space instead, hand grabbing his jaw again to tilt his head up again. He studied Daryl's face, tightened the grip when he tried to look away. His voice was softer, every bit as firm as it had been when Shane had him pinned down but something different. "You will follow the rules though."

It wasn't a question, just a simple fact, and that somehow made it worse. His mind wanted to rebel at that but his instincts were nearly purring inside him and he almost fell over himself trying to nod, unable to when Rick's hold didn't loosen. He caught on quick though,

and there was only a little snarl in the word. "Yes." The question burning at the back of his brain spilled out before he could stop it as he motioned to the tent, "How did you know that I wouldn't punch you for coming in here? What made you thinkâ€¦" He choked on the words a little and was thankful when Rick let him go, he couldn't finish the sentence looking at him. Staring at his bedroll he finished the sentence, "How did you know I was weak like that?"

"You're not weak."

Daryl felt like it though, and he pushed down the urge to tell Rick, tell him everything. Instead he shrugged, "What would you call it?"

There was a long pause and when Rick spoke his voice was low, just between them. "I'd call it you being an omega that needed an Alpha's comfort."

The panic hit so hard it made him feel like he was going to be sick as his head jerked up to look at Rick. The words, the words that should be coming out weren't there though. He should be telling Rick he was wrong, denying it, but he couldn't force the words through his lips.

Rick reached out, touching his face and letting him turn in to it as he spoke, voice soft. "Your brother told me." Rick knelt up for a second and pulled something out of his pocket, shoving it at Daryl. He took them, recognizing them instantly and felt some of his anxiety ease. "He was worried what would happen if he didn't make it back, was worried about what Shane would do."

Some deep anxiety was unwinding at the knowledge that an Alpha knew what he was, that an Alpha was there to protect him. Merle protected him but he was a beta at the end of the day. Logic fought to the forefront though and he had to know, "Why did he tell you when you was the one that cuffed him up there."

Rick shrugged, "I guess he thought he could trust me. I told him we'd come back for him but just in case something happened... his first concern was you." He pointed at the suppressants, "I know there aren't many, but make sure you take those, I can nearly smell the omega on you, and in a few days Shane will be able to. We don't want a heat coming on when we aren't prepared for it." He didn't straight out say it but those words told him that Rick knew how much stronger than Shane he was, and that was reassuring too.

Daryl nodded, his throat tight, but if his brother had decided to trust this man he would as well. Merle had known what he was doing telling Rick, knew what could happen, there was no going back now.

Rick stood what he could in the tent and didn't hesitate to touch Daryl again, squeezing his shoulder, "We'll head out first thing in the morning. I'm gonna go out and finish getting things together before it gets dark, you come out when you're ready. Okay?"

He started to nod but remembered quickly that Rick seemed to prefer verbal confirmation so instead he mumbled out, "Yea, okay."

Rick nodded and left without another word, leaving Daryl staring after him, confused.

End
file.